

Humanists and Rederijkers.

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have tasted happiness in large draughts, in spite of the literary and theological quarrels that dogged him at Basel, where he spent the last period of his cosmopolitan career.

Erasmus of Rotterdam is the resplendent luminary of the northern Renaissance. Beside him the smaller lights of humanism in the Netherlands are almost invisible. Yet he was only the most distinguished of a band of scholars that flourished contemporaneously in these highly civilised Burghundian lands—Agricola, Wessel, Muromellius, Rode, Hoen, and many more. These men were, like Erasmus, animated by the reforming spirit, and some of them—Hoen and Rode, for instance—were, unlike him, prepared to take sides with Luther. Among the people, too, the literary associations, known as the *Rederijkers*[^] had nurtured a popular taste for poetry and drama of a rough-and-ready type. These popular literary associations pilloried the vices of the age in Church and State in their rude dramatic pieces, and thereby quickened the critical spirit which was preparing to assimilate the teaching of the militant reformers when the time should come. We are wont to speak of the phlegmatic Dutch. I do not think that Dutch history bears out the epithet. It shows them to be the most resolute and heroic of nations when heroism and resolution are called for by some great danger or disaster. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, at all events, there was no more alert, quick-witted, unmanageable people in Europe.

The militant reformers had, in fact, begun the attack in the Netherlands long before Luther nailed his thesis to the door of the Wittenberg church. The Brethren had tried to reform from within and had failed, as the reformers from within had everywhere failed. If the Brethren in general kept within the limits of orthodoxy, some of those who were trained, in their schools or inspired by their teaching struck a bolder note. John of Goch, John of Wesel, and John of Wessel were indisputable heretics, though they did not formally separate from the Church. With the evangelical views of John Pupper of Goch, prior of an Augustinian convent at Mechlin in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, Luther does not seem to have been acquainted. John of Wesel—whether Niederwesel in the duchy of Cleves, or Oberwesel in